

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Issues on place, culture and natural integration are increasingly becoming important globally as people world-wide begin to express their concerns on the degradation of places rich in landscapes of cultural significance (UNESCO, 1962). Fowler (2001) explained that by recognising 'cultural landscape', we almost have for the first time given ourselves the opportunity to recognise places that may look ordinary, but with our appreciation these become extraordinary. Whereas, McNeely and Keeton (1995) suggested that currently, there is greater awareness of the links between culture and natural diversity.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had expressed its concern on and interest in the area of landscape as long as forty years ago (UNESCO, 1962). Certain themes to do with landscape can be seen running consistently through a series of deliberations by the World Heritage Committee since around 1980, and most of these are still on the agenda of this committee (Fowler, 2003). Nevertheless, the concept of cultural landscape has only been recently introduced into the ambit of the World Heritage Convention.

However, Platcher and Rossler (1995) contend that every natural region in the world has cultural landscapes of international standing, but it has lost most of its intrinsic value due to human influences. As a result, the protection, preservation and promotion of cultural landscape become regular topics of discussions among academicians, art connoisseurs and the ordinary people alike. The Malaysian

Government, through its various agencies concerned, assiduously endeavours to conserve and protect the heritage of the country, and is enacting the antiquarian legislations as and when the need arises. The International Council on Monument and Sites (ICOMOS) plays a leading role in evolving definitions and formulating policies on the conservation and protection of cultural landscapes. It has organized several meetings at the national and regional level since 1993, and has continued to make major contribution in this important field of activity (ICOMOS, 1999). In pursuing sustainable economic development for the country, the Malaysian Government is also cognizant of the need to conserve and protect places of cultural and social significance. This concern on the part of the government has led to the continuous search for suitable approaches to manage the environment. Therefore, a holistic approach is needed to maintain places of cultural and natural significance in the country.

The distinctively Malay cultural landscapes of significant places in Malaysia provide valuable insight into the diverse traditions, cultural values and lifestyle of the community, each within its own natural environment. Each segment of the larger Malay community traces its cultural origin to the surrounding natural landscape such as forest, river, hill and sea. These natural landscapes provided the early community with a source of livelihood, and play a vital role in fulfilling its cultural, physical and spiritual needs. To appreciate the identity of important places in Malay communities, one needs to understand the relationship of the Malays and their respective natural landscapes. Understanding the Malay cultural landscape is, therefore, an integral part of the whole process of examining places of cultural significance in Malaysia and developing these into heritage centres to be appreciated by the public. It is one of the important activities in the conservation and preservation of the characteristics of the various Malay communities in our country.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RELATED ISSUES

Malay towns as studied by Hamid (1988) and Ezrin (1985) began as traditional Malay settlements with its own fascinating cultural landscape

environment. Several old towns such as Kota Bharu, Kuala Terengganu, Kuala Dungun, Pekan, Johor Lama, Bandar Maharani, Kelang, Kuala Selangor and Kota Setar were initially Malay towns because of their physical and non-physical elements. With dynamism, about half of these towns evolved into the capitals of their states.

However, such towns are currently undergoing tremendous changes due to rapid industrialisation, economic development and urbanisation. The original characteristics of these towns have changed as a result of increasing population, migration, economic wealth and changes in lifestyle brought about by the development of modern housing schemes, business premises and other infrastructures. A myriad of development activities taking place across the country do not leave these towns untouched. Modern structures such as skyscrapers encroached into the town centres and Malay historic sites.

As stated in *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals) as well as in other sources of Malay literature, the Kuala Terengganu town centre was founded by a Malay Sultan in the early 18th century. This is also evident by the discovery of Terengganu coins which bear the name of Sultan Zainal Abidin, dating back to 1708. The town was rich in Malay cultural heritage. It was built as a self-containing Malay town with the palace, mosque and market built within walking distance of each other to serve the daily need of the community. The Kuala Terengganu town centre was replete with characteristics reflecting the culture of the Malays who live or used to live there.

In Kuala Terengganu, the palace was the administrative centre, the mosque as a place of worship, the market as place to conduct commercial activities, and the traditional villages a place where the larger community lived. Today, the Malay cultural landscape in the town centre is facing threats from changes brought about by rapid development. These threats are real and can be seen in its working. Take the case of old palace. Even though it is maintained, it is now only used for royal ceremonies. Many of the traditional villages in the old quarters had been replaced with commercial buildings and modern houses development, and this process will continue with the other remaining traditional villages. There is a need for the

authority to monitor and control development that impinges on the pristine existence of these villages.



Figure 1.0: Malay traditional settlement in Kuala Terengganu town. Rapid development has diminished the identity of the Malay cultural landscape
Source: Fong C. T. et. al, (1996)

The location of Kuala Terengganu town centre by the riverbank and along the coast is a manifestation of the relationship between Malay communities and their natural surroundings. In bygone days, rivers served as an important mode of internal transportation, while the sea, a source of livelihood and trading links to outside areas. Nowadays, land transportation has largely taken over from water transportation and the main port for passenger boats had been shut down, while some parts of the coast had seen land reclamation works. Thus, the riverbanks and seashore have lost their original landscape characteristics.

In terms of building designs, the Malay traditional houses are replete with natural and friendly characteristics in respect of ventilation and lighting, and the builders had used materials which could withstand the vagaries of local climatic conditions. Unfortunately, most of these unique architectural features of the traditional houses have not found their ways into the modern houses. Even the present inheritors of these old houses are oblivious to their heritage values.

Rapid development has affected adversely the cultural landscape environment of the traditional Malay physical (palace, mosque, market, river and traditional Malay villages) and non-physical (human activities) elements in Kuala Terengganu town centre. The uniqueness and importance of this Malay cultural landscape is in

danger of being lost forever. This study is an attempt at examining the role of Malay cultural landscape in maintaining and improving the identity of the historic town. It identifies the role of Malay cultural landscape in the conservation, preservation and restoration of traditional Malay physical and non-physical elements in the locality.

1.2 HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis testing in this study involves the analysis of terminologies used in describing the Malay traditional physical and non-physical elements and the approaches made when constructing the town under study. The incorporation of cultural landscape is reflected in the characteristics of Malay traditional town and becomes its identity.

1.3 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The goal of the study is to investigate the character of Malay cultural landscape in the context of traditional town with Malay identity using Kuala Terengganu as a case study, and to come up with guidelines on the preservation and development of towns with Malay identity in the country.

To above goal is accomplished through the following objectives:

- i. To analyze the importance of Malay cultural landscape in the formation of place identity,
- ii. To identify the character of Malay cultural landscape of traditional Malay towns from the perspective of history, place and cultural significance,
- iii. To provide recommendations on the improvement of Malay cultural landscape in enhancing the identity of Malay towns in Malaysia.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The goals and objectives of the study are translated into several research questions to serve as a guideline in conducting the research. These are:

- i. What are the character and elements of Malay cultural landscape in the context of traditional Malay towns?
- ii. Does cultural landscape influence the evolution of traditional Malay towns?
- iii. What are the characteristics of the cultural landscape in a traditional Malay town identified in the study area?
- iv. What are the cultural landscape elements that need to be maintained in order to preserve the unique characteristics of a traditional Malay town?

The first and second questions will be covered in Chapter 3 through literature review. The importance of place identity and Malay cultural landscape for traditional town will be established. The third and fourth questions will be addressed through a case study, which will be reported in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, to determine the identity of the traditional Malay town in the study area. The fourth question is re-visited in Chapter 6 in regards the conservation of the unique characteristic of cultural landscape in traditional Malay towns.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study applies the descriptive case study research method in identifying the characteristics of Malay cultural landscape. The physical and non-physical elements of the town are identified using the multiple case study design. A triangulation technique or multiple methods is adopted involving the analysis of data/information obtained through a combination of interviews, observations and documentation.

The research began with literature review in order to understand the meaning, importance, role and components of Malay cultural landscape. Based on the current Malay population and general observation of the physical and non-physical evidence, only Kota Bharu, Kuala Terengganu and Johor Lama have characteristic features of a Malay town (Sundra, 1998). However, taking into consideration of historical evidence as well as the presence of physical and non-physical elements, only two Malay towns were selected for the research, namely, Kuala Terengganu and Kota Bharu.

The case study compares the two Malay towns and identifies their Malay cultural landscape characteristics. The information were collected from historical documents (records from archives, books and journals), interviews with historians and local people of the selected towns. Based on the findings of the two case studies, the characteristics of Malay cultural landscapes are established. The identified characteristics of the cultural landscapes will be used as a guide during the survey and analysis of the present Kuala Terengganu town. Overlaying technique is applied in the analysis of the survey to identify the potentials and constraints of the site, which would be useful in improving the quality of Malay cultural landscape environment.

Figure 1.1 shows the flowchart of the overall research methodology adopted for identifying the character of Malay cultural landscape in Kuala Terengganu town. A detailed discussion on this research methodology is made in Chapter 2.

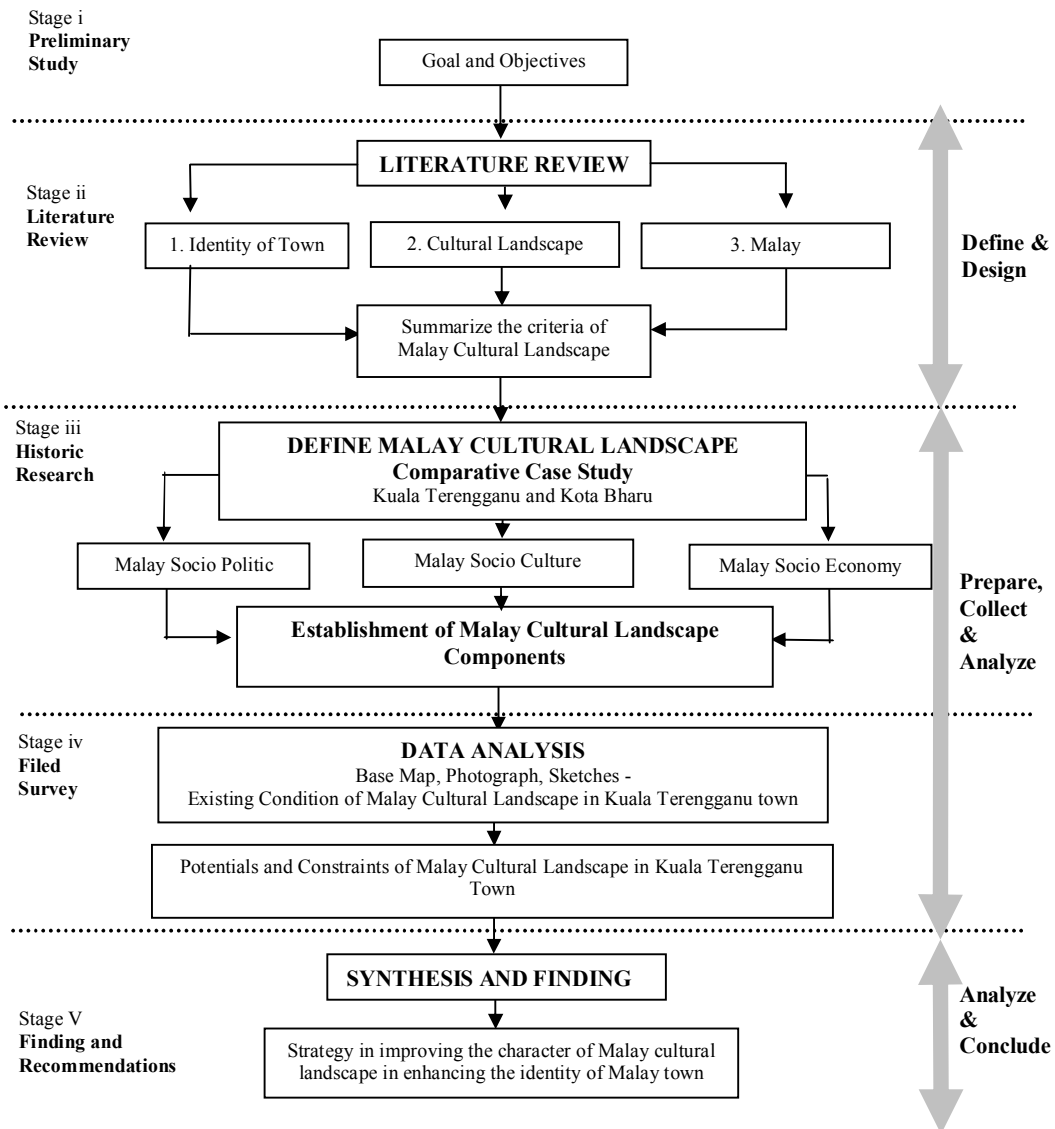


Figure 1.1 – Flow Chart of Overall Research Method

1.6 STUDY AREA

Detailed research was carried out in Zone A of Kuala Terengganu old town centre (based on Local Plan of Kuala Terengganu Town Centre) (Figure 1.2) and in Cultural Zone of Kota Bharu town (Figure 1.3). Results from the two areas will be compared to reinforce past observation on the characteristics of Malay cultural landscape.

Kuala Terengganu and Kota Bharu are located on the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia. According to the last census, approximately 90% of the populations of these towns are Malays (MPKT, 1993 and MPKB, 1999). Both towns are the historic, cultural and social centres of Malay community. Many traditional Malay houses and a number of significant historic buildings and sites are still preserved in and around these two towns. Moreover, these towns still depend on natural resources from the land, rivers and sea as their source of livelihood, although other new sources of income are emerging. Both towns have not been affected by outside influence in terms of the setting creation and arrangement of buildings even during colonial occupation and when Japan invaded the country in 1941-1942. The characteristics of Malay town are still intact to this day as stated by Sundra in *The Encyclopedia of Malaysian Architecture* (1998):

“Early Malay town usually evolved around the sultan palaces and the mosques because these were the two centres of cultural and religious activities. Traditionally, there were no fixed boundaries in a Malay town, although the reaches of the prayer call (azan) of the town mosque sometimes determined the town’s boundary.”

(Sundra, 1998: 60)

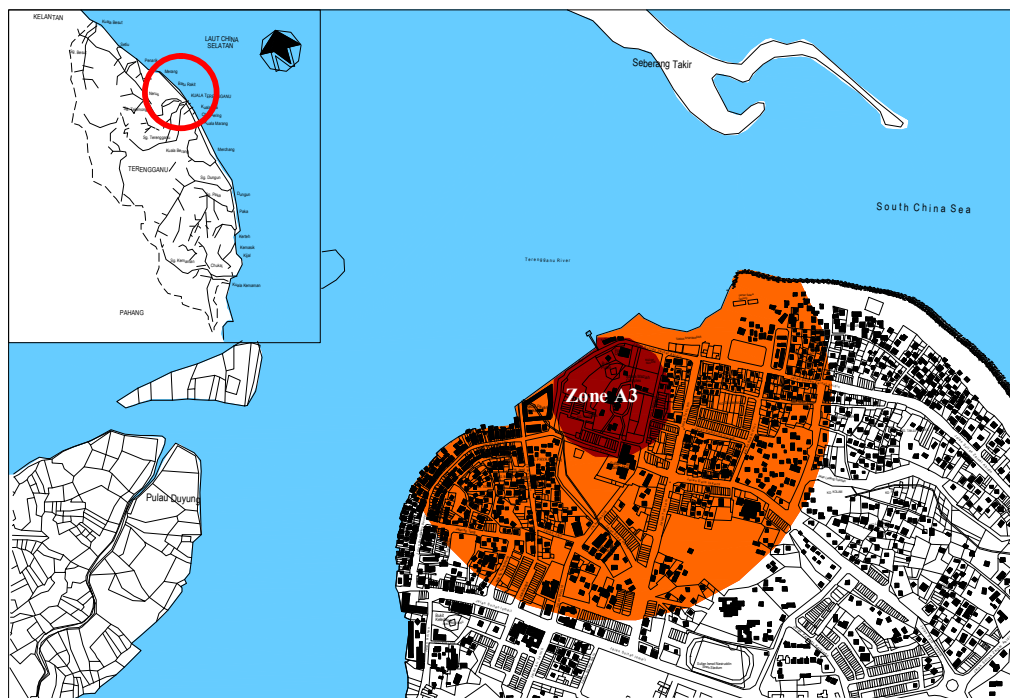


Figure 1.2: Study area at Kuala Terengganu town centre (Zone A3 of Kuala Terengganu Local Plan). (Not to Scale)

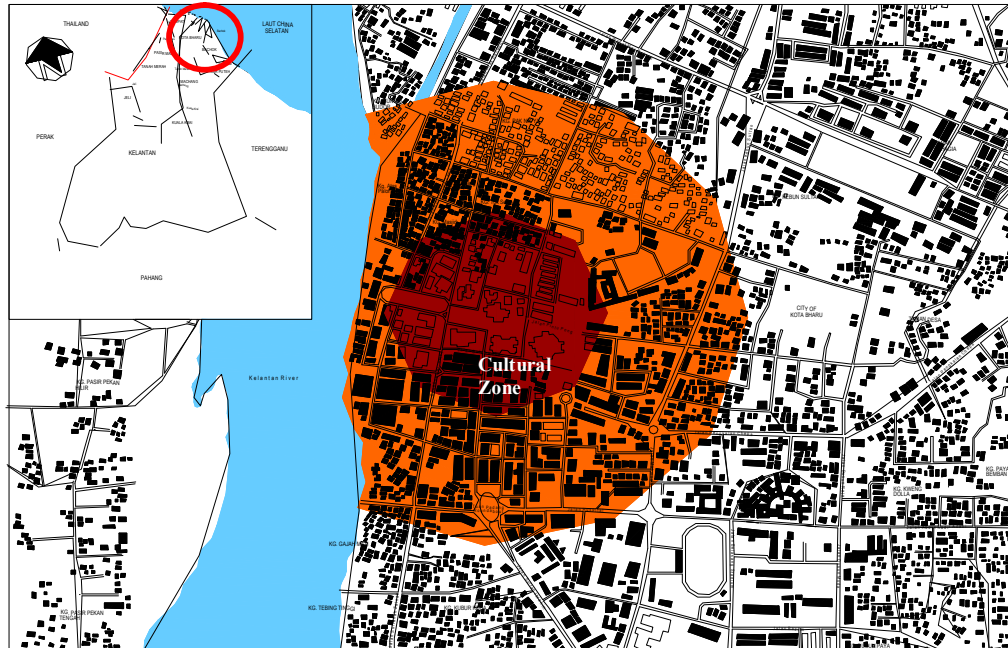


Figure 1.3: Study area at Kota Bharu town center (Cultural Zone) (Not to Scale)

1.7 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study confines itself to the analysis of the role of Malay cultural landscape in improving the identity of traditional Malay town. The discussion is mainly in the context of physical and non-physical elements of Malay cultural landscape, which influence the character of Kuala Terengganu town centre as a Malay town.

Primarily, the research is focused on defining the characteristics of Malay cultural landscape in traditional Malay town. It is carried out through literature review (Chapter 3) and historical research on Malay towns (Chapter 4). In the historical research, two towns in east coast were selected for a case study to verify the historic significance of Malay cultural landscape characteristic.

The established features of past Malay cultural landscape in these two towns are deemed to exist within the physical and non-physical elements of the cultural

landscape in the present Kuala Terengganu old town. The field survey was carried out to identify the problems that contributed to the diminished and reduced quality of Malay cultural landscape within the study area. At the end of the study, the research would come up with a strategy to improve the character of the place through Malay cultural landscape conservation guidelines.